THE SCHOOL OF ATHENS: MOMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF AN IDEA[1]

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This article reflects on how ancient Athens — in its historical as well as metonymic sense — has been employed as an education for the world and for all time to come. In a broad sweep through history, it has little pretention to be either a disinterested or an in-depth historical enquiry. Rather, it presents yet another attempt to come to terms with the current position of the Classics in academia, taking its cue from the saying of Confucius that 'one who understands the present by reviewing antiquity is worthy to be a teacher'.[2] Simultaneously, it aims to remind us, albeit obliquely, of aspects of a humanities education which are currently neglected or perhaps even forgotten. It will be shown that Thucydides already connected the idea of Athens as a school to democratic ideology, a link still present in later associations between the liberal arts and a classical education.

During the past century, Greco-Roman antiquity has been toppled (or liberated, as many would argue) from its romantic, idealised and normative pedestal.[3] Nowadays, the classical gaze on antiquity has splintered into a profusion of directions. More realistic about the reach of their discipline, and less inhibited in how its object ought to be approached, the interests of career classicists vary from high level abstraction to grass-roots complexity, from delicate poetry to 'courtesans and fishcakes' to 'joking, tickling, and cracking up'.[4] We now consider the flaws of the ancients as much as their accomplishments. For better or for worse, 'Athens' has become an intellectual tool more than the measure it used to be in centuries past.

Ideals have the ability to inspire and so to transcend immediate context. The classicist, on the other hand, tends to always look with greater rigour at

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[2] Quoted by Raaflaub 2013:3.

[3] This includes the exaggerated historicist expectations of 19th and early 20th century *Altertumswissenschaft*; *cf.* Latacz 1995, Vogt 1997.

[4] Titles of books by Davidson 1997 and Beard 2014, which perhaps exemplify the changes in interest.

contingency; in the case of ideals, classicists endeavour to bring them back to the contexts in which they were expressed. When the currents of ideal and contingency cross, the result is often destabilising, even though the ideals themselves rarely get discredited in their entirety. In what follows, I will pause briefly at expressions of an ideal from three vastly different time-space coordinates: fifth century Athens, Rome in the *Cinquecento*, and mid-nineteenth century Ireland. In each case, I shall consider the dialectic relationship between the ideal — Athens as 'school' — and its contextualisation. Only the first of my three moments belongs to classical antiquity, but all three expressions have in their own right become classic texts.[5] The first, Pericles' funeral speech in Thucydides, sets up Athens as a society to be emulated. The second, a painting by *maestro* Raphael from high Renaissance Italy, narrows 'Athens' down to its intellectual legacy. The final moment, Henry Newman's *The idea of a university* from Victorian Britain, argues for the liberal arts as the core of a university education.[6] I will trace the link between democratic ideology in Thucydides, through the Renaissance ideal of open intellectual enquiry, to Newman's idea of the university as a space for the cultivation of the mind. While any demonstrable dependence between the three instances is unlikely, they nonetheless offer a particular, narrowing trajectory of how Athens, and what the city came to stand for, has been appropriated.

Our first text takes us to Greece of the fifth century BC, and the funeral oration of Pericles in Thuc. 2.35-46.[7] Halfway through this famous speech, Pericles claims his city, Athens, to be the παίδευσις τῆς Ἑλλάδος, the school or the education of Greece (2.41).[8] In context, Pericles by this phrase refers specifically to Athens' democracy and the kind of citizen it produces (2.36).[9]

Thucydides' *History* is a monumental work in which the historian reports in meticulous detail on the 5th century war between Athens and Sparta which lasted for 27 years. In terms of the devastating wars the world has since experienced,

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5 'Texts' here understood in the broad sense of cultural products subjected to critical analysis.

6 My discussion proceeds in regretting realisation that it can do justice to neither these classic texts themselves nor the vast scholarship on them. In terms of Hansen's distinction between spotlight and chandelier scholarship (2006:vii-viii), I hope it to be considered in the latter category.

7 Scholarship on Pericles' funeral oration is immense; some of the best treatments are listed in Hornblower 1991:294-316; see also Sicking 1995, Bosworth 2000, Raaflaub 2006; (partial) reception of the speech in Roberts 2012:140-156; specifically on 2.41 in Potter 2012:93-115.

8 Jowett's 'the school of Hellas' (1900:130) has proven to be influential; Warner 1905 and Hammond 2009 have 'education'; Hornblower 1991:308 prefers 'example' for the link back to 2.37.

9 *Cf.* Raaflaub 2006:192.

Thucydides' claim to the greatness of this particular conflict between neighbouring city-states may appear overdrawn.[10] But like most things classical, it is not so much about the 'what' than about the 'how': the way in which Thucydides goes about his task proved to be foundational to all historical writing to come. In a brief methodology (1.22.4), he describes his method as to research the detail of the events with the greatest possible rigour. Disregarding the fabulous, the romantic, and — as it turns out, the divine and the personal, not to mention the feminine — he aimed at clarity of insight: into what actually happened, but also into recurring patterns of political behaviour. For, he concludes his brief methodology, his purpose was to write not a throw-away rhetorical exercise, but a κτῆμα ἐς αἰέι, a possession for all time.

In the early parts of the history, Thucydides affords his main Athenian protagonist three speeches. The second speech is a truly classic text, and among the most influential texts in the history of democracy. Its setting is the funeral of the Athenian soldiers who died during the first year of the war. The main thrust of the speech is — somewhat surprisingly — not a eulogy of the dead, but of the city's constitution, the reason why Athens is a παράδειγμα (paradigm, example) to the other Greek states. 'Our constitution', says Pericles, 'does not imitate those of our neighbours … For it is rightly called a δημοκρατία, because it is geared towards the many, not the few'. In what follows, Pericles gives an exposition of the Athenian success story as flowing from this constitution, which shapes the souls and the behaviour of its citizens. Some of the main points from the first section will illustrate its purport.[11] Equality before the law is counterbalanced by public esteem based on excellence and merit. The political system allows for drawing from the talents of the whole citizenry. Nobody is held back from contributing to the common good due to poverty or humble origins. In everyday life, people are free to live as they please. Tolerance reigns in private life, but the public sphere requires obedience to the laws of the city. Publicly, the state provides for various forms of recreation. Privately, the people themselves add to the pleasant atmosphere by adorning their homes. Goods are imported from all over to enhance the Athenian quality of life. On military matters, Pericles contrasts the Athenian way directly to

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[10] Thucydides saw this war as 'the greatest κινήσις the Greeks ever had to contend with' (1.2).

[11] *Cf.* also Raaflaub 2006:196. Earlier in the *History* (1.70), Corinthian ambassadors to Sparta link Athenian success to national culture: the Athenians are innovative and quick to set new ideas in motion; the Spartans, on the other hand, are conservative and slow to act. The Athenians are adventurous and bold, often testing the limits of their abilities. The Spartans, in contrast, are distrustful of what they can accomplish and careful to remain within their means. The Athenians are up and about, the Spartans afraid to leave home. On this topic, *cf.* Luginbill 1999.

that of the totalitarian Sparta. They are conformists, with rigorous training, discipline and secrecy; the Athenians maintain a casual, open life-style, but nonetheless remain formidable.[12] Unlike in Sparta, the Athenians aspire to beauty and intellectual endeavour. They accumulate wealth not to show off but to contribute to the common good. Being a direct democracy, citizens either stay abreast of what goes on in politics or be considered 'useless'; they talk things through properly in public before putting policy into practice.

The eulogy on democratic life ends triumphantly with a neat *inclusio*, by which the term παράδειγμα at the start of the speech has gained the more precise meaning of παίδευσις, an education:

> ξυνελών τε λέγω τήν τε πᾶσαν πόλιν τῆς Ἑλλάδος παίδευσιν εἶναι καὶ καθ᾽ ἕκαστον δοκεῖν ἄν μοι τὸν αὐτὸν ἄνδρα παρ᾽ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ πλεῖστ᾽ ἂν εἴδη καὶ μετὰ χαρίτων μάλιστ᾽ ἂν εὐτραπέλως τὸ σῶμα αὔταρκες παρέχεσθαι.
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> In brief, then, I say that our whole city is an education to Greece, and it seems to me that each man among us can apply himself with self-sufficiency and versatility to the greatest variety of circumstances and with the utmost grace.

Significantly, Pericles adds to the idea of the city as a παίδευσις a description of the exemplary adaptability of the individual Athenian. The intricate, condensed description contains the interrelated notions of self-sufficiency, versatility, and the ability to deal gracefully with various circumstances. While Pericles does not spell it out in so many words, he evidently implies that this mindset, shared by all men of the city, is somehow the consequence of living under the democratic constitution.[13] We will see shortly how very similar qualities return in Newman's view of the outcomes of a liberal education.

Thucydides' dense style notwithstanding, we are after two and a half millennia struck by how modern the eulogy seems. This overlap is not the result of historical continuity: Athens has since Hellenistic times been renowned for its art, literature and philosophy, but it took the world a long time to favour its democratic constitution, not until the nineteenth century. It appears, as Hansen has argued, that similarities between the ancient and modern constitutions independently produced

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[12] See also Hdt. 5.78.

[13] Zagorin 2005:68 refers to the 'free and many-sided development of personality, a life combining thought and action and consisting in the exercise of diverse faculties — intellectual, practical, and aesthetic'. He also, rightly in my view, emphasises 'the supreme obligation of loyalty and service to the city'; *polis*-centred values which return in liberal education as 'benefits to the common good'. With regard to the essential overlap between the values of ancient and modern democracies, *cf.* especially Hansen 1992, 2004, 2008.

similar mentalities.[14] Today, and also in our own country, the Periclean vision is ubiquitous.[15]

At this point, however, the dialectic between ideal and historical contingency must set in, a process which removes some of the glitter of this rhetorical gem. First, the limited nature of ancient democracy is sobering, at least from a modern perspective. The freedom and equality of Pericles' eulogy extended only to citizens, that is, freeborn adult males of Athenian descent. While the idea was certainly revolutionary in ancient times, it does sound less impressive when one considers that no more than one eighth of the population were eligible to vote.[16] Secondly, the speech's function and position within the text require careful consideration. There are considerable complexities involved in the role of speeches in the *History*, but the bottom line is that Thucydides constructed them to be contextually appropriate.[17] They cannot be equated simply with the actual words spoken at the historical occasion, nor should they be read as reflecting the views of the historian himself (even though elements of both may be present). In this particular case, we have good reason to believe that the speech is that of the historian, not the statesman. To what extent its ideology reflects that of the historical Pericles is difficult to assess; what we can state with certainty is that Thucydides had very definite textual purposes with the speech at this juncture within his narrative.[18]

When the funeral oration occurs in Book 2, the war's first year was negotiated with relative success. Athens maintained control of the sea and was reasonably successful on land as well. Its empire was relatively stable, and its resources continued to grow. The city was at the height of its power. A gloating Pericles is certainly not out of order at this point. The triumphant tone, however, appears misguided almost immediately after the speech, when Thucydides describes the outbreak of a plague within the walls of the city which decimated the

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14 Hansen 1992:27.

15 *Cf.* Roberts 2012 on the *Nachleben* of the Periclean *epitaphios.* The similarities to Lincoln's Gettysburg address, also a eulogy of democracy at a war funeral, are remarkable; *cf.* Roberts 2012:146-152.

16 Demographic estimates of Athens in the classical period as a whole, and before and after the war are contentious, but *cf.* discussions in Jones 1986:161-180, Hansen 1991:86-94, and further in Hansen 2006. A rough estimate of 300 000 inhabitants at its height suffices for present purposes, which corresponds to full citizen rights for about 30 000 voters, of which the Pnyx could accommodate 6 000 for an assembly meeting.

17 On the speeches in Thucydides, *cf.* various in Stadter 1973, more recently Morrison 2006, Pelling 2009:176-187.

18 For the historical context, see Bosworth 2000 who is (at 16) positive that it contains a 'potent distillation of the speech Pericles actually delivered' and that the burden of proof lies with the sceptics; similarly Sicking 1995:424.

population and damaged its moral fabric (2.47.1-55.1). The ebb and flow that follow outline Athens' gradual demise: self-interested populist leadership led to misguided decisions in the assembly, which in turn led to disastrous undertakings. In Thucydides' view, Athens self-destructed, despite its much-vaunted constitution. In 404 BC it capitulated to Sparta. For Thucydides, who wrote from a post-war perspective, Athens offered no ideal but rather a warning: like all things human (τὸ ἀνθρώπινον), their demise shows them as subject to three negative forces: prestige, fear, and self-interest (τιμή καὶ δέος καὶ ὠφέλια; *cf.* 1.76 *passim*).

On democracy as a system, the historian had serious misgivings. Democratic Athens was a wild shoot, prone to error and only able to flourish when the δῆμος found guidance from an extraordinary leader.[19] In his summary view of Pericles' career, he states that Pericles 'led the mass more than was led by them' and that Athens 'became in word a democracy, but in practice a rule by the leading man' (2.65.9). The funeral speech, from this perspective, becomes an ambivalent text: did it express personal conviction, or was it mere war propaganda, the shrewd statesman playing his audience in his own personal power game? To Thucydides, the democratic ideal was at best highly fragile, at worst a rhetorical ploy.[20]

Perhaps the darkest shadow cast on Athenian democracy was the way in which it managed its empire. The Delian League was originally set up to counter the Persians, but soon drifted towards Athenian control and became the main source of the city's wealth. As the strongest state in the League, Athens extracted protection money from their small allies to fund their own expenses. From a modern perspective, both Pericles and Thucydides are remarkably unapologetic and blunt about Athens' ἀρχή, even though acknowledging its dubious morality. In the funeral speech itself, Pericles exhorts the Athenians to love their city not because of its constitution, but for its power (δύναμις),[21] and in his final speech he warns them that '[t]he empire you possess is by now a tyranny — perhaps wrong to acquire it, but certainly dangerous to let it go' (2.63 trans. Hammond). An appalling cameo of *Realpolitik* later in the history continues to portray Athens as the tyrant towards the small island of Melos: imperial power can afford neither morality nor justice; it can only increase the brutality of its oppression.

But, taking another step back, do we as modern readers have to accept Thucydides' grim view of human nature? Does his critique of Athenian democracy annul the democratic ideal itself? In Thucydidean scholarship, the author was traditionally regarded as the dispassionate realist who — in Nietzsche's view —

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19 A discussion of Thucydides' criticism of democracy in Jones 1986:62-72; *cf.* also Raaflaub 2006:195-212.

20 *Cf.* Potter 2012:93-96; Raaflaub 2006:220-221.

21 *Cf.* Crane 1998:322.

did not flinch in the face of reality.[22] But during the course of the 20th century, scholars have become more aware of his own gaze, to the point where a 'post-modernist Thucydides' has started to emerge.[23] His effort to suppress his own view masks an intensely personal involvement with his subject. For some, this raises the suspicion of ulterior motives for writing the history, whether for shifting blame for the war from Athens or for exonerating Pericles and his war policies of Athens' eventual defeat.[24] Others argue that Thucydides' negative view of democracy does not square up with the facts. In reality, Athenians from all social strata bought into the system, and the city's decisions and policies were for the most part well-considered and prudent.[25] While its empire certainly contributed to the city's prosperity in the fifth century, a resurgence of economic activity after the restoration of democracy warns against over-estimating this factor. Democratic ideology encouraged an environment of future-orientated self-investment and collaborative commerce within a civic solidarity, enabling improved standards of living across social strata.[26] Apart from an increase in per capita income, its culture of tolerance, personal freedom and freedom of expression drew economic, artistic and intellectual capital from across the Greek world. The classical city experienced an efflorescence of culture on a scale unprecedented in world history. So it came about that subsequent history less heeded to the warning of the historian than it was inspired by the vision of his protagonist. Athens came to set the standard for centuries to come, not for its political constitution but for presenting the epitome of civilization, the acme of art, literature and thought.

Perhaps the most eloquent visual expression of Athens as school is the fresco by High Renaissance painter Raphael, at the start of the *Cinquecento* (1508). Its current name, *La Scuola di Atene*, appeared in print only some 130 years after it was first painted, though scholars do not discard the possibility that this was its name from the start.[27] The name is somewhat misleading, as the figures in the

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22 Nietzsche 1889 ('*Was ich den Alten verdanke*, 2'): *Der Muth vor der Realität unterscheidet zuletzt solche Naturen wie Thukydides und Plato: Plato ist ein Feigling vor der Realität, — folglich flüchtet er in's Ideal; Thukydides hat sich in der Gewalt, folglich behält er auch die Dinge in der Gewalt* …; on this topic, *cf.* Zumbrunnen 2002.

23 Connor 2009.

24 The views of, among others, Badian 1993 and Luginbill 1999; *cf.* Duff 1999; Foster 2010.

25 Jones 1986:42, 62-64, *passim.*

26 Josiah Ober 2013 in private communication; *cf.* also Ober 2006, Davies 2008, Möller 2008 and Von Reden 2008.

27 In Gaspare Celio's *Memoria delli nomi dell'artefici delle pitture che sono in alcune chiese, facciate e palazzi di Roma*, written from 1620 and published in 1640; *cf.* Nesselrath 1997:12; Bellori 1997:48.

painting are only by exception from Athens: the group rather represents the totality of ancient pagan learning.

Raphael's *School of Athens* is regarded as one of the finest examples, if not the highlight, of the classic Renaissance style.[28] It depicts a graceful scene of men clothed in ancient dress and engaged in various forms of intellectual activity: conversing, reading, explaining and listening. They are set within a luxurious Roman-like architectural structure, through which the eye is lured to the open, blue sky beyond.[29] The figures are framed by oversized statues of two Greek gods: Apollo on the left and Athena on the right.[30] Two central figures dominate the scene. These are easily recognisable, by the books they carry, as Plato and Aristotle: Plato has his dialogue, the *Timaeus*, under his left arm with his right hand pointing to the heavens. Aristotle holds his *Nichomachean Ethics* horizontally, echoed by an outwardly gesturing right hand.[31] Around them Raphael, in his typically effortless composition, organised the figures into three horizontal and two vertical groups, belonging either to Plato's or to Aristotle's side.

Understandably, the identities of the 58 figures in the painting have intrigued scholars for a long time.[32] Some are easily recognisable: Socrates with his snub nose to Plato's right, Pythagoras in the bottom left (identified by the prominent tablet held in front of him), Euclid (the father of geometry) in the bottom right group, flanked at the very right by a group including Zoroaster (with a celestial globe) and the astronomer Ptolemy (with a terrestrial globe). At the very right we find a self-portrait of the painter, glancing sideways to the viewer. In the

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28 Hall 1997:21-22 notes that already the 16th century author on the Renaissance painters, Giorgio Vasari, 'singles Raphael out for the grace and perfection of his style, for the ease with which he represented everything, and for the appropriateness of his expression, gestures, drapery, movements, the order and force with which he arranged them'. Bellori (end 17th century) put Raphael's classic style with ancient Greek sculpture as the pinnacle of art — the ideal beauty in these two forms based on correcting the imperfections of nature; *cf.* Hall 1997:23-26.

29 On the architectural composition and its function, *cf.* Lieberman 1997:72-77. The architecture reminds of the massive structure of the imperial baths (Caracalla, Diocletian or Trajan), the pantheon or the Church of St Peter; either way, it deliberately sets Greek learning in Rome; *cf.* Rowland 2005:104.

30 Apollo probably represents art, music and poetry and Athena wisdom; *cf.* Bellori 1997:55-56. Secondarily, Apollo was often considered the Greco-Roman precursor of Christ and Athena / Minerva of Mary; *cf.* Rowland 1997:151-153; 2005:104-105.

31 Plato's gesture suggests transcending the physical world to the metaphysical, and Aristotle's ordering the world along ethical categories; Rowland 2005:105.

32 In the 16th century, Giorgio Vasari managed to identify eight and in the late 17th century, Bellori came to eighteen; in the 19th century, art historians J D Passavant and W W Lloyd identified fifty figures and, late in that century, A Springer claimed fifty-two; *cf.* Hall 1997:32.

centre of the composition is the nonchalant figure of Diogenes the Cynic making his body do the talking; below him that of a brooding Heraclitus, the obscure weeping philosopher. We also, possibly, have an image of the 12th century Muslim polymath Ibn Rushd or, as he was known in the West, Averoës.[33]

The painter's task was to dramatise intellectual content, and he made use of models still occasionally recognisable. Plato's face, for instance, resembles that of Leonardo da Vinci, whose stay in Florence in the years 1500-1506 coincided with that of the young master of Urbino. Another model was Donato Bramante, a distant cousin of Raphael who at the time worked in Rome as architect of Pope Julius II. Raphael, who believed painting to belong to the realm of geometry, significantly set himself in the same group as Bramante / Euclid. The muscular, foreshortened figure of Heraclitus in the centre is recognisable as Michelangelo and resembles the master's Sibyls and prophets. It is interesting that this figure was absent from the detailed cartoon of the fresco and probably inserted at a late stage: Michelangelo was at the time of painting right next door to Raphael, toiling away at the massive ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Raphael was, as gossip would have it, allowed to peek at his great rival's work in progress and not only had the audacity to paint Michelangelo, but also in his own, colossal style![34]

In isolation, the painting expresses an attractive, self-contained ideal: a group of scholars in a graceful urban setting, suggesting privilege and leisure. Apart from clothing and architecture, the scene transcends the boundaries of history. There is no sign of any pressing social reality or great emotion. Signs of power and hierarchy are virtually absent: the gods are only allowed a presence as lifeless symbols on the sides. The only form of authority present is that of speaker and listener, or of teacher and pupil. Plato may be pointing upwards, but that is (in the painting at least) to the blue sky of everyday experience — the heaven not of religion but of science. In their casual interaction, the scene reminds of the open, free and egalitarian society of Pericles' ideal Athens.[35]

When we start adding historical context, the picture attains greater depth. Much water has gone under the bridge in the intervening 18 centuries since the heyday of Classical Athens. The city lost its empire at the end of the war, and its political independence some 80 years later. It clung to its intellectual prestige for much longer, with sporadic revivals under Hellenophile emperors of Rome. Christianity rose and Rome fell, Greek culture and learning took refuge in Constantinople and flourished for a while among Arab scholars. During the rise of

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33 *Cf.* Rowland 1997:155.

34 Likewise, Plato / Leonardo was painted in Leonardo's own *sfumato* style.

35 With the exception of Averoës and Zoroaster, the figures typify the proverbial dead white European males. The identification of the female-looking figure above Pythagoras as Aspasia has not found wide acceptance.

the Ottomans, Greek custodians of ancient learning trickled into early Renaissance Italy, a trickle which became a flood when Constantinople fell in 1453. With them, they brought hundreds of texts by the authors of ancient Greece, in particular those of the philosophers. The humanists of Renaissance Italy eagerly absorbed the new cultural influences from the east and expressed them in their art and in their design to integrate Christianity with pagan antiquity.

This was the environment in which Pope Julius II in 1508 commissioned the young master from Urbino to fresco the walls of his personal suite in the Vatican Palace. The group of papal chambers commissioned to Raphael would come to be known as the *Stanze di Rafaello*. The *School of Athens* comprises one of the four painted walls in one of these chambers. Later known as the *Stanza della Segnatura* ('Signature Room'), it was at the time designated to be Julius' personal library. Libraries in those days were divided into the subject categories of the books in the collection. Usually, as in this case, it comprised Theology, Philosophy, Poetry, and Law. The four categories are indicated by the plaques on the room's ceiling, also painted by Raphael. Philosophy has a female figure inscribed with the motto *causarum cognitio,* or 'the knowledge of causes'. Directly opposite Philosophy, Raphael painted Theology, with the label *divinarum notitia* ('acquaintance of things divine').[36] The theology fresco itself is a magnificent depiction of the transubstantiation of the Eucharist, entitled *La disputa del sacramento*. The top half presents the holy trinity vertically (Father, Son, Holy Spirit as dove), with Christ flanked by the apostles, and the philosophers of the church in discussion on both sides of the holy sacrament right on the vanishing point. The two dominant frescoes facing one another constituted the world of the intellect and of religion. Together, they rhetorically express the world that Pope Julius II wished to advocate: a glorious synthesis of the totality of learning within the seat of papal power.[37] Pagan antiquity welcomed in the bosom of the Church.[38]

Within this setting, the painting invites closer inspection with regard to message and purpose. Scholars have noted in particular its reflection of a current cultural / intellectual controversy. At the time of painting, Aristotle was by far the more established figure, since the 13th century integrated into scholastic thought. Plato, on the other hand, was relatively new to the scene and in some corners vehemently opposed as irreconcilable with Christian doctrine. But from the mid-15th century Plato was destined to make a forceful comeback, in particular through

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[36] One may note the subtle difference in tone from the authority and revelation suggested by the Theology label, to the open enquiry of Philosophy's label.

[37] Julius' nickname, the 'warrior pope' is evidence of his worldly ambitions. He modelled himself to some extent on his namesake Caesar, wishing to play the role of emperor-pope in Rome; *cf.* Rowland 1997:131-132 and, more extensively, Shaw 1993.

[38] Verdon 1997:122-129.

the influence of Greek orthodox theologians like the scholar Cardinal Bessarion (1403-1472). In 1460 the whole Platonic oeuvre was brought to Rome and there translated into Latin by the Neo-Platonist Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), who argued for the reconciliation between pagan philosophy and Christianity.[39]

We are not sure how these debates filtered through to the young (25 year old) Raphael who was not educated to the degree that his painting suggests.[40] Scholars have proposed various possible guides. Rowland finds evidence of the theology of the contemporary theologian Egidio da Viterbo, while Joost-Gaugier proposes Julius' librarian, the large, boom-voiced Tommaso Inghiram, who probably makes an appearance in the fresco as Epicurus.[41] Be that as it may, philosophical tastes at the time in Rome inclined towards the *pax philosophica* or the *Concordia Platonis et Aristotelis*.[42] The philosophical reconciliation fitted in well with another current idea, namely that Rome was to be the new Athens, the custodian of ancient Greek culture now that Constantinople has fallen.[43] We can see these ideas reflected in the painting in various ways. No antagonism is visible between the two main figures; only Aristotle's sandals indicate his greater establishment within learned society. At the bottom of the painting, Pythagoras' sketch of musical harmony is shown to the viewer.[44] The relaxed harmonious interaction between the figures was not merely artistic flair: this was what he intended to convey.[45]

Iconographic analysis of the work can occupy us for much longer.[46] I only wish to dwell briefly on the various groupings of figures, which seem to represent

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39 For a discussion of the intellectual world at the time, *cf.* Rowland 1997.

40 A brief biography of Raphael in Hall 2005:1-12.

41 Rowland 2005:103; Joost-Gaugier 2002.

42 Hall 1997:35 and n.57, referring to Garin 1989.

43 Battista Casali in 1508 gave a sermon in which he proclaimed Rome to be 'a new Athens'; Rowland 2005:103.

44 The Greek phrase ἐπ'ὀγδόων in the heading refers to the concord between the first and the last note of an octave.

45 Plato's *Timaeus* has caused considerable speculation, but its appropriateness in a context of universal learning complementing religious knowledge is evident: In this dialogue, Plato presents the beautiful orderliness of the universe as the product of a 'rational, purposive, and beneficent agency', the divine Craftsman who is Intellect personified. The *kosmos* also provides a 'model for rational souls to understand and to emulate' (Zeyl 2013), giving the cosmology of the dialogue an ethical as well as a religious dimension. It thus links up both with Aristotle's ethics and with the idea of philosophy as preparation for divine knowledge.

46 Among others, the colours used in the dress of the central figures resemble those of the four principle elements and as such signify the philosophies: red and purple on Plato signify fire and air, pointing to Plato's idealism, while the blue and brown of Aristotle (water and earth) reflect his interest in the mundane world. Apollo, god of poetry and

the subjects of medieval and Renaissance learning. On the top levels of the fresco are represented the *Trivium* ('three ways') of Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric, which together formed the basics of the liberal arts education. They prepared the student for the *Quadrivium* or the four applied sciences on the lower steps: geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music. To drive home the point of intellectual progress, Raphael has depicted, at the right foreground, a lovely allegorical scene around his teacher Bramante / Euclid. Each figure in this small group of young learners represents a different phase in the process of intellectual maturing: the youngest, intensely attentive, is still in the phase of literal learning. The second youngest kneeling figure bears the expression of dawning comprehension. The third figure, next to Euclid, anticipates the outcome of the problem being explained and, with an 'expansive and controlling gesture', already sees its application. The fourth figure, with pointed finger, assumes the role of the apprentice pedagogue or teaching assistant.[47]

As part of a larger design, Raphael's School of Athens was subordinated to the Church, and in particular to the ambitions of the warrior pope. On its own, however, it depicted a graceful world of the intellect, a space of free and open enquiry. We see Pericles' Athens transformed into the idea of a university. The legacy of Athens continued to dominate the ideal of learning in the centuries to come, also after the *Aufklärung*, when universities gradually wrestled free from their subordination to church and doctrine.

For my third moment in the ongoing history, I would like to pick up on the idea of a university which Raphael's fresco alludes to. There has been much discussion recently on 'what universities are for'[48] and on the diminishing role of the Humanities within tertiary education.[49] A 'constant point of reference' in the debate, invoked by admirers and detractors alike, is John Henry Newman's collection of discourses under the title *The idea of a university, defined and illustrated* (1852).[50] Our coordinates, then, move to Dublin midway through 19th

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prophesy, is on Plato's side and Athena, goddess of wisdom and war, sides with Aristotle. Below the gods on each side are two marble reliefs, each scene signifying human instincts that may, with intellectual effort, be turned into virtues.

47 From Hall 1997:13.

48 The title of Stefan Collini's recent book, which includes an illuminating section on Newman, 2012:39-60.

49 The fate of Classics is closely bound to the current position of the formative disciplines in a utility-dominated intellectual environment. This is especially so in the post-colonial economy where labour hirers, themselves of a particular brand of education, have little insight into the particular skill set acquired from a rigorous Humanities degree.

50 *Cf.* Collini 2012:40, who refers to Pelikan 1992 and Turner 1996, the former claiming Newman's treatise to be 'the most important treatise on the idea of the university ever written in any language'.

century. The Catholic Church in Ireland had recently received the blessing of Rome to establish a university for this long neglected and oppressed island, and they asked Cardinal Newman to assist in the endeavour. Rising to the challenge, Newman came up with the now classic series of discourses.

Newman opens his discussion by stating the essence of a university as 'a place of teaching universal knowledge': teaching, the reader soon discovers, figures in the context of his discourse in opposition to discovery and research, while 'universal knowledge' is opposed to moral or religious instruction. The latter is somewhat surprising, given that Newman was under specific instruction to establish a Catholic university. Newman does indeed acknowledge the university's reliance on the church to protect its integrity, but is careful to delineate a division of spheres. What the previously disadvantaged students of Ireland needed was not that which the domain of the church could offer, but 'the culture of the intellect' or 'cultivation of the mind' (1852:xiv-xv). There is no reason, Newman states, that the Irish, 'robbed, oppressed, and thrust aside', should not also enjoy the benefits of that which English universities offer to their people, namely the benefits of liberal education.

These benefits, of which Newman seemingly had an endless store, include 'a courtesy, propriety, and polish of word and action' (xv), also 'freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom', 'the force, the steadiness, the comprehensiveness and the versatility of intellect; the command over our own powers, the instinctive just estimate of things as they pass before us' (xv):

> When the intellect has once been properly trained and formed to have a connected view or grasp of things, it will display its powers with more or less effect according to its particular quality and capacity in the individual. In the case of most men it makes itself felt in the good sense, sobriety of thought, reasonableness, candour, self-command, and steadiness of view … In all it will be a faculty of entering with comparative ease into any subject of thought, and of taking up with aptitude any science or profession.[51]

These liberally educated individuals benefit society in numerous ways: they raise the intellectual tone of society, cultivate the public mind, purify the national taste. And so, in Collini's words, it rolls on.

What kind of knowledge should be imparted to students in order to attain these qualities? Newman is adamant that this knowledge must be free from the requirement of usefulness: it is knowledge for its own sake. Its usefulness lies in what it does to the intellect: the health, the enlargement, the illumination of the mind: 'Knowledge ... is valuable for what its very presence in us does for us after

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[51] Newman 1852:xvi-xvii; *cf.* also 139, 166.

the manner of habit, even though it be turned to no further account, nor subserve any direct end' (Newman 1852:104).

Collini refers to the impression that Newman's liberal education remains strangely without content or even skill-set: rather, he focuses on 'the relation in which [students] come to stand to their knowledge, the manner in which they dispose of it, the perspective they have on the place of their knowledge in a wider map of human understanding' (2012:49). This is, in his view, part of its success: '… by couching his justification in terms of manner or tone, of a relation rather than a content, he provides a rhetoric which is portable ... to a variety of cultural and educational traditions' (2012:50). I can only partly agree on the lack of content, since Newman is quite clear that he has in mind the — at the time — traditional curriculum of Classical education.[52] Secondly, Newman claims that the benefits of a liberal education come from personal exposure to the wide range of subjects and the assemblage of the learned at a university. By being exposed to a variety of specialists in their field, the student somehow 'breathes in the pure and clear atmosphere of thought' (Newman 1852:101).

Looking back on our journey of the School of Athens, Newman's habits of mind resemble the grace and versatility in various circumstances of Pericles' Athenian citizen. His picture of the university as an assemblage of the learned in a pure atmosphere of thought could have been a description of Raphael's fresco.

It is not difficult to deconstruct Newman's idea of a university as the product of Victorian Britain, and as a form of initiation into the social elite. Collini has shown the dogmatic undertone of his expositions and pointed to the failure of the whole undertaking.[53] Rothblatt questions the very idea of 'the idea' of a university, which he links to Newman's dependence on Coleridge and in opposition to the increasingly powerful utilitarian tradition from Bacon and Locke through Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.[54] His greatest error of judgement, it appears in hindsight, was to side against the demand for useful knowledge as part

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52 Newman takes the Classics as basis for education for granted. In a comparison between the emphases of Newman and Thomas Arnold, Ellis 2007:59 notes the following: 'Most important, in this context, is the determination of both men to combine classical studies and Christianity, not only within an ideal of university education, but within an ideology of manliness defined by the possession of that education … For Arnold, classics provided the perfect form and principle of the state; for Newman, the perfect training of the mind. Both, however, required Christianity to provide the all-important moral element necessary to realise both ideals in full'. *Cf.* also Stray 1998:46-82.

53 Newman repeatedly tried to resign from his position of rector and finally managed to do so in 1858; the university attracted few students and was later absorbed into the National University of Ireland.

54 Rothblatt 2006:12.

of university education,[55] thus perpetuating a dangerous dichotomy in the field of knowledge and relegating the liberal arts to the historically weaker side of the battle.[56]

The personality of Newman and his relationship to his beloved Oxford stand close to the centre of the issue. The desperately shy Newman arrived in Oxford aged 13. After completing his studies, he was not offered an academic fellowship but stayed on as vicar to gather — through his mesmerising sermons — a devoted following of 'Newmaniacs'.[57] The mere presence of the pale, thin, ascetic vicar caused a respectful hush among students, as he glided like a spiritual apparition 'though the aisles of St. Mary's, rising into the pulpit and then, in the most entrancing of voices breaking the silence with words and thoughts which were a religious music — subtle, sweet, mournful'.[58] The charismatic clergyman drifted gradually towards Roman Catholicism and, in the process, away from Oxford. But he kept on loving the beauty, romance, and mystique of the Oxford colleges, and evidently idealised the Oxbridge pedagogy: the personal transfer of experience in the close-knit community of tutors and students.[59] While he half-heartedly attempts to divorce his educational ideal from the English gentry, it is clear that his view of the product of university training is firmly embedded in the heady tripartite alliance, during the heyday of Victorian Britain, of aristocratic politics, Anglicanism, and the Classics.[60]

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55 *Cf.* in particular Discourse VII ('Knowledge viewed in relation to professional skill').

56 When from 1808 the curriculum of the British universities came under attack in the *Edinburgh Review*, Oxford University (by means of Oriel College provost Edward Copleston and fellow John Davidson) reacted by casting the critique as utilitarian reductions. Newman took much of his views on liberal education from this defence of Oxford before its radical reforms later during that century. Newman refutes the utility argument by referring to Cato's opposition to the introduction of philosophy in late Republican Rome: 'The fit representative of a practical people, Cato estimated every thing by what it produced; whereas the Pursuit of Knowledge promised nothing beyond knowledge itself. He despised that refinement or enlargement of mind of which he had no experience' (1852:106).

57 *Cf.* Dexter & Horan 2007:37.

58 Matthew Arnold, as quoted in Dexter & Horan 2007:36-37.

59 The practice resulted in the tutorial system, recent eulogies on which in Palfreyman 2008. Stephen Leacock's definition (1921, in Palfreyman 2008:21) satirically reflects Newman's ideal: 'What an Oxford tutor does is to get a little group of students together and smoke at them. Men who have been systematically smoked at for four years turn into ripe scholars … A well-smoked man speaks and writes English with a grace that can be acquired in no other way'.

60 Stray 2007:1-13. The *Literae Humaniores* (or 'Greats'), established in 1800, was the premier course on offer until the early twentieth century and Greek and Latin remained compulsory until the Greek requirement was dropped after World War I and Latin some 40 years later.

British institutions shared the predominant position of Classics with the rest of Europe into the twentieth century.[61] Germany in particular embarked on a massive project in which antiquity unified the educational programme, *Bildung durch Wissenschaft*. Unlike Newman's aristocratic collegiality, the Humboldtian idea of the university meant a process of reflection and self-realisation, a quest for intellectual and spiritual growth.[62]

The School of Athens entered the educational scene at the Cape of Good Hope from this background: already on the demise as educational ideal and heavily burdened by being pagan, elitist, normative, non-utilitarian, and — increasingly — colonial and Eurocentric. Today, Classical Studies' position within the curriculum is modest, perhaps appropriately so. The fact that it nonetheless manages to muster a good deal of enthusiasm, and to shed at least some of its obsolete features, says much of its inherent vitality. The standing of the Humanities within the current university is, however, a reason for concern and will continue to be if the sharp line between useful and useless knowledge is not somehow softened. This is even more the case in developing economies with, as in our case, high unemployment on the one hand and a skills shortage on the other. The future discourse on tertiary education should include, in my view, both skills development and intellectual maturing. That is, adapting J F Kennedy's famous line, to focus not simply on 'what I can do with knowledge', but also on 'what knowledge can do to me'. One wonders if the skills shortage would not be matched more appropriately by promoting the versatility of a solid Humanities training. Unfortunately, the Humanities remain vague on how exactly the qualities of a cultivated mind arise from the study of the liberal arts disciplines. While we need not agree with Collini's verdict of a total mismatch between means and ends,[63] unless we can introduce greater precision on the notion, we will remain on the back foot.

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61 In France, Latin had the dominant position; Britain and Germany, in reaction since the social upheavals of the Revolution and Napoleontic wars, fostered an emphasis on Greek culture.

62 Vogt 1997:132 states as goal of German *Bildung* the '*Erweiterung und Bereicherung des eigenen Denkens und Lebens*'; Rothblatt 2006:22-23 as an 'individual effort to achieve intellectual and spiritual perfection', the process of reflection and study 'through which individuals reached and internalized the highest values of national culture'. The disciplinary crown of the educational enterprise was classical philology or *Altertumswissenschaft.* The project produced giants of scholarship, but the seeds of historicism present from its outset finally led to its demise since after the First World War and the death of its main exponent, Ulrich Wilamowitz von Moellendorff.

63 *Cf.* Collini 2012:51: '… as Newman's sonorous periods echo in our ears — what is acquired by the student, we are told, is 'a faculty of judgment, of clear-sightedness, of sagacity, of wisdom, of philosophical reach of mind, and of intellectual self-possession

In conclusion: we followed the idea of the School of Athens from its 5th century BC ideal of an open and free democratic society, through the Renaissance where it expressed the ideal of universal learning as arising from such a society, to where it functioned, in Victorian Britain, as the backbone of the liberal arts curriculum. I doubt, even at this low ebb, that the history of the idea has yet reached its end. The long view, which Classicists tend to hold more than anybody else, suggests that Athens still has some life among the ruins. After all, it infuses both our society and the essence of the university. While no silver bullet was offered to the current ills of the Humanities, I hope the angle might at least provide stimulation for further reflection.

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and repose' — we cannot help but think that a lot is being expected of a facility for turning English verse into Latin epigrams'.

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